

Rapid Analysis of some existing Communities of Practice in the livestock sector

Alan Duncan, Feb 28, 2017

Disclaimer: The list of CoPs analysed is ad hoc. Some of the text has been lifted direct from the websites of the various CoPs. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses is based on the quick impressions of the author and not based on any rigorous analysis.

Communities of Practice are an increasingly popular means of bringing together stakeholders around common interests. In a helpful [2-page flyer](#), the Swiss Development Corporation define a CoP as:

“a group of committed people, active in a common domain, with a genuine interest in each others’ expertise based on their own practice. Members combine their own interests with an open mandate from their organisation and work together in a rather informal structure.”

The flyer suggests 6 common elements of a CoP:

1. There is a **Community**. A Community has active members with a lively interest in sharing their knowledge. Being a community means something special to the members, and the community has a certain priority. It is not just “what I do after six in the evening”. Members are keen to meet each other because they benefit from the community.
2. There is a **Domain**. A CoP has a clear domain, a thematic orientation that is neither too narrow nor too large. This domain is relevant and meaningful to the members; they are interested in specific topics and expect to improve their own practice by sharing experience related to what they do.
3. There is a **Practice**. Each and every member has his/her own practice within the domain of the CoP, and members know about each others’ practice. One’s own practice serves as a kind of reality check when sharing experience, concepts and strategies. Reflecting on one’s own practice against the background of other practices is one of the essentials of a CoP.
4. There is **Motivation**. A CoP exists only through the motivation of its members. This motivation is recognizable by their personal interest and the priority they assign to the CoP in their daily work. Adhering to a CoP often means developing a passion for it.
5. There is a **Mandate**. By means of a mandate, the management of the organisation shows its interest in and commitment to the CoP. It defines, on one hand, the thematic focus and the expected concrete results. On the other hand, the mandate provides an open space for self-commitment to its members, in terms of time and financial resources.
6. There is a balance of formal and informal **Structure**. A CoP is a structure beyond organisational boxes and lines. Hierarchy is not an important element. Most CoPs crosslink organisational units and organisations.

The Supporting Evidence-Based Interventions (SEBI) project aspires to establish and facilitate a CoP around “livestock data for decision making (LD4D)”. The project met with a range of potential members of the CoP during a BMGF Convening in January 2017. The Convening provided the opportunity for the nascent CoP to brainstorm around some of the elements above. Discussions dwelt on issues such as Domain, Practice, Structure and Membership. The Convening charged the SEBI Core Team to synthesise the discussions and to conduct a rapid assessment of existing CoPs in the livestock research for development sector to:

- Ensure that LD4D does not simply replicate what other CoPs are doing
- Gather ideas for what works and what doesn't work with a view to avoiding past mistakes
- Support the rapid establishment of the LD4D CoP

The following rapid analysis takes the various CoPs suggested at the Rome Convening as its starting point. Each of these has been scrutinized using internet research of their web presence. A short summary of each CoP is then provided under the following titles:

Domain: what is the scope of the CoP?

Membership: which categories of individuals and organizations belong to the CoP?

Practice: what is it that the CoP members have joined forces to help each other with?

Structure: how is the CoP arranged in terms of governance and management?

Communication channels: how do CoP members communicate with each other?

Funding: what is the funding model and who are the major donors?

Strengths: what are the strengths of the CoP from which LD4D could learn?

Weaknesses: What are the weaknesses of the CoP that LD4D should avoid?

In each case, to make the document readable, a limit of one page per CoP is adhered to. In many cases, the material is cut and pasted from websites and then distilled to capture the main elements.

CoPs suggested by participants of the Rome Convening

- AGMIP – research focused, biophysical
- Global Round Table for Sustainable Beef
- Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock – policy focused, includes agro industry
- IPCC – science, policy
- ISI-MIP – agro meteorology
- SSP – Shared Socio-economic Platform (note: invisible on web)
- GRA – Global Research Alliance
- Pastoralists Knowledge Hub
- IFAD Pro-poor livestock development
- Livestock Global Alliance
- IPCC – Science to Policy

The Agricultural Model Intercomparison and Improvement Project (AgMIP)

Domain: improve the state of agricultural simulation and to understand climate impacts on the agricultural sector at global and regional scales.

Membership: US Universities and CGIAR centres mainly. Led by Columbia University, University of Florida and Oregon State University.

Practice: *Improve agricultural models* through intercomparison and evaluation using high-quality global and regional data and best scientific practices, and document improvements for use in integrated assessments. *Collaborate with regional experts* in agronomy, animal sciences, economics, and climate to build a strong basis for model applications, addressing key climate-related questions, adaptation priorities, and sustainable intensification. *Improve scientific and adaptive capacity* in modeling for major agricultural regions in the developing and developed world, with a focus on vulnerable regions. *Develop modeling frameworks* to facilitate data-sharing and to identify and evaluate promising adaptation technologies and policies and to prioritize strategies.

Structure: As a global research program, AgMIP operates as an alliance among donors and partners. Donors provide financial support for contractually agreed-upon outputs and outcomes. National and regional partners are autonomous programs, operating at country or regional scales that contribute in specific ways to AgMIP initiatives, as defined by Agreement. AgMIP also includes individual members who are interested in engaging in AgMIP activities and abide by the AgMIP Standards of Conduct.

AgMIP's Steering Council guides the organization, ensures its scientific integrity through review processes and exercise of budgetary expertise, establishes policies that apply throughout the broader organization, and facilitates a high level of cooperation across the entire organization. To ensure a balance of scientific perspectives, the Steering Council is composed of donors, partners, and members, with at least 50% of the council comprised by representatives of AgMIP partners and members.

Communication channels: Mainly through meetings.

Funding: DFID and USDA as well as CCAFS and USAID

Strengths: Lots of high level technical expertise; very well established and resourced; good representation of global agricultural modelling expertise especially from OECD countries and CGIAR centres.

Weaknesses: Rather formalized and rigid. Membership probably by invitation. Heavily biased to US and CGIAR centres without so much presence from national stakeholders from LMICs. Heavily dependent on donor support and therefore vulnerable to changing funding priorities.

Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef

Domain: The Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) is a global, multi-stakeholder initiative developed to advance continuous improvement in sustainability of the global beef value chain through leadership, science and multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration. The GRSB envisions a world in which all aspects of the beef value chain are environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable.

Membership: GRSB consists of five constituencies: producers and producer associations, the commerce and processing sector, retail companies, civil societies and national or regional roundtables. The possibility to participate as an observer member also exists.

Practice: *identifying, evaluating and enabling increased adoption of current leading production and supply chain practices, policy and technology; supporting action-oriented, regional and local multi-stakeholder initiatives* focused on producing measurable outcomes, ensuring local adaptation; *addressing high-priority issues* related to sustainability by sharing locally relevant and science-based information and support pilot projects to demonstrate those; *providing a forum* and opportunities for constructive engagement, information exchange and technical problem solving.

Structure/governance: The framework of the GRSB consists of five constituencies: producers and producer associations, the commerce and processing sector, retail companies, civil societies and national or regional roundtables. Of the general assembly, 19 members make up the board of directors; three from each of the constituency groups except for the roundtable constituency which elects four directors. In addition, the president, vice president and the secretary-treasurer serve as ex officio members of the board. Committees to cover the workings of the roundtable itself are formed from the membership and include Finance, Membership, Grievance and Communications. The board of directors creates the technical working groups and guides their scope of work. It is through these working groups that most of the GRSB's work is accomplished. Some of the industry's issues for which the working groups are examining and seeking solutions include deforestation, a life cycle assessment, beef sustainability issue scan and harmonization, sustainability supplier survey and the planning of global conferences.

Communication channels: Meetings, technical working groups on key issues

Funding: Membership subscription according to tiered structure related to size of organization. Individuals can also join.

Strengths: sustainable funding mechanism, wide constituency from producers right through value chain, action-oriented

Weaknesses: Focused on OECD countries, rather formalized structure

Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock

Domain: The Agenda is a partnership of livestock sector stakeholders committed to the sustainable development of the sector. The Agenda builds consensus on the path towards sustainability and catalyzes coherent and collective practice change through dialogue, consultation and joint analysis. The partnership unites the forces of the public and private sectors, producers, research and academic institutions, NGOs, social movements and community-based organizations, and foundations.

It simultaneously addresses the following issues:

- Global food security and health
- Equity and growth
- Resources and climate:

Membership: Many members, mainly high level including national ministries, private feed companies, welfare lobbying organisations, research institutions, UN agencies, donors. See [here](#) for full list.

Practice: Agenda partnership conducts the following joint activities:

- Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue at international, national and local level
- Conduct analyses to enhance joint understanding on livestock sector sustainability
- Promote and support innovation and local practice change

Structure/governance: The CoP consists of the following components:

- **Open Multi-Stakeholder Platform to consult/build consensus on priority issues and actions.**
Composition: representatives of all relevant sector stakeholder groups which have signed the Agenda Consensus. Stakeholders who have not signed the Agenda Consensus can participate as observers only.
- **Guiding Group to provide overall strategic direction and guidance to the Agenda, to coordinate, monitor and review Agenda activities and to promote the Agenda. Decisions are made by consensus.**
Composition: up to 5 representative from 6 constituency clusters (Public sector, private sector, Academia/research, donors, NGO, social movements and community based-organizations), Focus Area Chairs, and Chairs of Agenda-supported regional, national or local MSPs.
- The Guiding group has an Executive Committee (6 members) responsible for the implementation of its decisions and advice.

Communication channels: Big global meetings, e-mails, focus groups

Funding: unclear from website but probably FAO – looks expensive to run

Strengths: Global reach, high level representation and therefore influence

Weaknesses: looks highly political and formalized hence not very agile. Not clear what actions have emerged so far

[Intersectoral Impact Model Intercomparison Network \(ISI-MIP\)](#)

Domain: ISIMIP offers a framework for consistently projecting the impacts of climate change across affected sectors and spatial scales. An international network of climate-impact modellers contribute to a comprehensive and consistent picture of the world under different climate-change scenarios.

Membership: ISIMIP was initiated by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and has since grown to involve over 100 modelling groups from around the world.

Practice: ISIMIP is organised into [simulation rounds](#), which are guided by a focus topic. For each round, a [simulation protocol](#) defines a set of common simulation scenarios based on the focus topic. Participating modelling groups are provided with a common set of climate input data, and other data (in some cases unique to one sector) necessary to ensure cross-sectorally consistent impacts simulations. Participation is open to all models capable of following the simulation protocol.

Structure/governance:

- ISIMIP is organized in five groups, representatives of which form the **strategy group**, which is the main decision-making body within ISIMIP.
- The day-to-day coordination of ISIMIP is the task of the **management group**, comprising the project leader, Dr Katja Frieler, the project manager, and the data manager.
- Each sector has one or more **sector coordinators** responsible for overseeing simulations in their sector and working closely with the participating modeling teams. The sectoral coordinators play a key role in liaising with other sector-specific initiatives in order to minimize the overall burden on participating modelling groups.
- The **Scientific Advisory Board (SAB)** is a voluntary group of 5-10 internationally renowned scientists offering oversight and strategic advice to ISIMIP.

Communication channels: Communications largely virtual and organized around a series of simulation rounds. This is a very focused CoP on a particular topic and with a well-defined set of tasks

Funding: Institutional support is provided by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Core funding is supplied by German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Strengths: Highly focused and with a clear set of tasks around assessing climate impacts; includes the main global climate modeling groups

Weaknesses: Relies on external funding and therefore vulnerable to changing funding priorities

[The Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases](#)

Domain: The Alliance is focused on research, development and extension of technologies and practices that will help deliver ways to grow more food (and more climate-resilient food systems) without growing greenhouse gas emissions.

Membership: Membership is open to any State represented by its competent authority (e.g. the nominated lead government department or agency for involvement in the Alliance). Participation in the Alliance is on a voluntary basis and it is for each country to determine the nature and extent of its participation in any Alliance activities. A country's membership is confirmed by formally endorsing the Charter.

Practice: work to deepen and broaden mitigation research efforts across the agricultural sub-sectors of paddy rice, cropping and livestock, and coordinate cross-cutting activities across these areas. Research Groups have been set up to address these areas of work. These Groups have developed work plans that bring countries and other partners together in research collaborations, as well as to share knowledge and best practices, build capacity and capability amongst scientists and other practitioners, and move towards solutions in addressing agricultural greenhouse gas emissions.

Structure: Membership is at nation state level. The Alliance is governed by the Alliance Council with each member state (currently 47) having one seat on the Council. The Council meets once per year. The Council oversees the work of three research groups: livestock, paddy rice and croplands. Research Groups establish action plans to move initiatives forward. The Alliance is supported by a Secretariat located in New Zealand.

Communication channels: Generally by meetings of Research Groups, e.g. Livestock RG has an annual meeting. Also Ad hoc virtual networks on particular initiatives.

Funding: No core funding and membership is voluntary and free. Funding model is unclear although the Charter notes that Member States can offer resources. Presumably richer countries make contributions to keep the Alliance afloat.

Strengths: Looks active and reasonably dynamic. Membership is at nation state level so presumably access to decision makers. Strong training element.

Weaknesses: Fragile funding model. Probably not very relevant to LD4D since membership is at Ministry level rather than at grassroots.

[Pastoralist Knowledge Hub](#)

Domain: The Pastoralist Knowledge Hub is an initiative bringing together pastoralists and the main actors working with them to join forces and create the synergies for dialogue and pastoralist development.

Membership: Various options for engagement. Anyone can join the **Forum** which is essentially an e-mail listserv that allows wide communication on topics relevant to pastoralism. There are about 600 forum members. There are also a number of institutional **Partners**. These include small pastoralist networks, donors such as IFAD, research institutes such as ILRI, advocacy groups, UN Agencies etc. A further engagement mechanism is through **Regional and Thematic Networks**.

Practice: The Hub comprises 3 main pillars: (1) Knowledge repository. A database that classifies and provides access to literature on pastoralism. (2) Pastoralist networks. A forum for pastoralist organizations to share knowledge and voice their concerns in policy making. (3) Partners. A tool for alliance with key players on pastoralism, allowing dialogue, coordination and exploration of synergies, as well as to showcase work done in the field. The Hub therefore helps those interested in partnership issues through knowledge sharing and convening of networks at a range of levels.

Structure: Hosted and essentially run by FAO so might not be considered by some as a genuine Community of Practice.

Communication channels: E-mail listserv, knowledge repository and regional and thematic network meetings.

Funding: Institutional support from FAO with additional funding from the German Government.

Strengths: Dedicated team working full time on the Hub. Excellent knowledge repository. Considerable convening power and strong set of partners. Political credibility through association with FAO.

Weaknesses: Heavily dominated by FAO so perhaps not very nimble or responsive.

[Community of Practice for Pro-poor Livestock Development](#)

Domain: Pro-poor livestock development

Membership: Free to join for individuals – members are added to listserv

Practice: The **CoP for Pro-poor Livestock Development** (CoP-PPLD) intends to be a global and inclusive partnership of practitioners, managers, researchers and other actors involved in livestock development that want to exchange experiences, manage relevant knowledge, and support learning across countries and institutions as an instrument to achieve better results.

Structure: Managed by IFAD. Intention seems to have been to host an online portal consisting of a knowledge base, a bulletin board, a roster of members and an “ask and answer” space.

Communication channels: A web portal and an e-mail listserv.

Funding: Institutional support from IFAD. Some funding from Italian and Finnish Governments

Strengths: Strong institutional support from IFAD and therefore credibility. Good web presence.

Weaknesses: Somehow never really took off for reasons which are not clear. Now appears to be relatively moribund. Perhaps too dominated by IFAD and hence limited buy-in from the livestock development community. No obvious governance structure beyond IFAD and therefore no ambassadors.